



CITY COUNCIL

Public Safety Committee

**Monday, January 5, 2009
5:00 p.m.**

Attendance: D. Sterner, M. Goodman-Hinnershitz, S. Marmarou

Other City Staff Attending: B. Reinhart, T. Butler, C. Younger, S. Katzenmoyer

Dennis Sterner, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:08 p.m.

I. Housing Permit Ordinance

Include escrow provision

Mr. Sterner questioned the progress of the research of adding this provision to the ordinance. Mr. Reinhart noted that he had no information to report on this topic at this time. Mr. Younger noted his belief that this would not be allowed by State law. He noted his willingness to monitor this issue but recommended that the current practice of placarding buildings should continue. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted that placarding is beginning to become more effective as more properties are shut down. The committee felt that this should remain an option if changes in State law allow for this additional tool.

Vacant property registration requirement

Mr. Reinhart noted that he is currently working on rewriting the Codes and this requirement will be included. He noted that the cost for the registration escalates on a progressive scale as the property remains vacant for long periods of time. This is to deter owners from allowing properties to sit vacant and deteriorate. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted the importance of having an accurate database of vacant properties.

Mr. Sterner questioned when this provision would be implemented. Mr. Reinhart noted that he is currently working with Inspector Gery on the Code updates. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz noted

the importance of protecting the City's housing stock. She noted her hope that properties not be allowed to remain vacant forever

Housing permits on all non-owner occupied properties

This is currently occurring.

Remove notification before citation requirement

Mr. Reinhart noted that additional notice is not being given before properties are placarded as letters were sent in August. He noted that the Property Maintenance Code requires notice before citation and will be removed as part of the Code update. He stated that a ticket system will be implemented which would remove much of the involvement of the MDJs in codes issues. He is hoping this will begin in April 2009. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that she was glad to see progress in this area.

Provide increased penalty for non-compliance

Mr. Younger reported that the maximum allowed by State law is \$1000 for the first and second offense and \$5000 for a third or more. Mr. Reinhart stated his belief that the local MDJs would feels this penalty is too high. He stated that the MDJs have been handing down \$100 fines and ordering payment of all fees.

Mr. Sterner questioned if this should be increased. Mr. Younger suggested increasing the amount of the scale between \$500 to \$1000 and up to the maximum allowable by State law.

II. Handicapped Parking

Ms. Butler noted that she has two samples to discuss – Harrisburg and Allentown. Harrisburg allows a parking space once a handicapped placard or license plate is issued by the State. Allentown allows a person to apply after acquiring State approval but adds additional conditions.

Mr. Marmarou relayed information pertaining to a City employee who abuses handicapped parking. He stated that a person who is denied a parking space should have to bring a lawsuit against the City to try to acquire one. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated her position that she's tired of constant lawsuits against the City.

Ms. Butler stated that the City needs to make reasonable accommodations. Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz stated that those abusing handicapped parking and compliance with State law are two different issues. Mr. Marmarou again stated that he is against changing the City's current handicapped parking ordinance.

Ms. Butler advised the Committee that Reading should base their amendment on the Allentown ordinance. Mr. Sterner requested Ms. Butler research to see if Allentown's ordinance has sustained any challenges. Mr. Marmarou requested Dr. Hassel attend the next Public Safety Committee meeting to hear his opinion.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz questioned if the amendment would include a penalty for misuse of handicapped parking. Ms. Butler replied affirmatively.

III. 2009 Goals

The Committee reviewed the 2008 goals.

Ms. Goodman-Hinnershitz requested adding public safety at schools including truancy, the dropout rate, and vandalism and fighting.

The Public Safety Committee meeting adjourned at 6:12 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted by
Shelly Katzenmoyer, Deputy City Clerk*